
The I. W. W. and the West

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The I. W. W. and the West

THE INDUSTRIAL WORKERS OF THE WORLD HAS WON A PLACE FOR ITSELF IN American folklore and literature although, as an organization with more precise ends, it was ineffectual and short-lived. This radical labor union, remembered primarily as a fraternity of Western migratory workers in lumber, mining and agriculture, preached its gospel of "One Big Union" and the "General Strike" from corner soap boxes, led exasperating wild-cat strikes, badgered local law enforcement officials, bore the brunt of anti-radical sentiment during the First World War, and then quietly withered on the radical vine without leaving many tangible fruits. On its guerrilla skirmishes with the "master class" it seemed to build only an exaggerated, fearsome reputation. Such a discrepancy between accomplishments and reputation invites study, if for no other reason than the possibility of exploring one facet of a durable American myth. The argument here presented is that the I.W.W. of legend derives from a tendency, only partly sustained by evidence, of stressing its "Western" character and habitat, thus making it another symbol within the complex myth of the West, that migrating American region of primitive vitality that serves as heroic age and seedbed of our national *virtu* and *pietas*.

An aura of romance certainly surrounds the I.W.W. Wobblies figure, for example, in a wide assortment of American novels, and such different writers as Zane Grey and John Dos Passos have used them in their fiction. Zane Grey made themimps of Satan compounding the troubles of an honest and patriotic wheat farmer,¹ but he nevertheless drew them as villains somewhat outside tame reality. Dos Passos sprinkles his ambitious trilogy, *U.S.A.*, with Wobblies, like Mac in the first narrative thread or Joe Hill, William D. Haywood and Wesley Everest in the inserted

¹ Zane Grey, *The Desert of Wheat* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1919).

biographical sketches.² Besides the obvious function they serve as radical martyrs in Dos Passos' leftish criticism of American society, they also serve as mythic symbols, as spiky individualists setting off the dreary conformism and money-grubbing of a decaying American capitalism. Consciously or unconsciously, Dos Passos chose Western Wobblies to serve these purposes, thus associating them implicitly with a traditional view of the West.

Other writers have placed the I.W.W. in the same kind of symbolic context that Dos Passos did in *U.S.A.* In a recent biographical novel by Wallace Stegner, the Wobbly protagonist, Joe Hill, is presented as the very type of the creative primitive, both frustrated and stimulated by his rude Western environment, seeking dimly a higher culture and esthetic.³ The central conflict of the novel, in a sense, is the personalization of a dilemma that Henry Nash Smith and others have found inherent in the "frontier hypothesis," the dilemma of a seminal and vital frontier that can only "progress" to the effete civilization that it nourishes.⁴ Even in a contemporary and sophisticated satire like Mary McCarthy's *The Groves of Academe*, a Wobbly briefly appears—in the wings, so to speak—in his mythic Western role, weaning an absurd "poet of the people" from the cant and sterility of Communism to a more elemental and vital anarchism.⁵ A repentant American Communist in his memoirs also strikes these particular strings of romance in describing a famous Wobbly exile, William D. Haywood, in Moscow. Benjamin Gitlow found Haywood a sick and lonely old man living out his expatriation in Russia, homesick amid the scholastic Bolsheviks, the noble savage from Utah expiring in a strange cage.⁶

As the I.W.W. withered and died after the First World War, its peculiarly "Western" character became fixed in the minds of many writers, journalists and scholars. Almost imperceptibly over the last generation the I.W.W. has been incorporated into the corpus of Western folklore, along with earlier mountain men, cowboys and sodbusters. Its heroes and exploits receive space in most of the compilations of American and regional folklore.⁷ In the Pacific Northwest alone Stewart Holbrook,

² John Dos Passos, *U. S. A.* (New York: The Modern Library, 1939).

³ Wallace Stegner, *The Preacher and the Slave* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1950).

⁴ Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950), pp. 250-51.

⁵ Mary McCarthy, *The Groves of Academe* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1951).

⁶ Benjamin Gitlow, *I Confess: The Truth About American Communism* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1940), pp. 467-69.

⁷ B. A. Botkin (ed.), *A Treasury of Western Folklore* (New York: Crown, 1951), pp. 627-30, 730; B. A. Botkin (ed.), *A Treasury of American Folklore* (New York: Crown, 1944), pp. 882-83, 886-87.

Archie Binns, Nard Jones and others have staked out a kind of regional claim on the I.W.W., using its violent and bumptious history for their local color purposes. Nothing much of historical analysis remains in most of these regional works. The I.W.W. *cause célèbre*, apparently, is to be understood as only another instance of frontier exuberance, like the shooting up of a saloon. In describing the I.W.W. disturbances at Everett and Centralia, Washington, Nard Jones wrote, "This was the frontier and a man spoke out, with his voice or with his gun."⁸ Archie Binns devotes many pages in a recently published book to twice-told tales about the I.W.W., presenting the Wobbly as some kind of frontier relic challenging the urbanization and capitalistic development of the Puget Sound region.⁹

By 1926 Stewart Holbrook had claimed the I.W.W.'s distinctive slang for the West, although admitting that much of it derived from general underworld and hobo argot.¹⁰ Twenty years later, in describing an old Wobbly of Portland, Oregon, a kind of Burnside Street landmark, Holbrook makes the Pacific Northwest the "real home of the Wobs," and ends his description with a hyperbolic coda that reveals in sharp relief the I.W.W. legend as it had developed by 1946:

. . . Boose will put away his colors and brushes, and talk of the great days when the Wobbly brand of revolution ran like fire through the wheat, the mines, the woods of the West; when the West fairly reeked of Wobblies, and the Wob organizers hung stiffly from bridges and trestles by their necks, or died on the bloody decks of the *Verona* in Everett harbor, or went down in the choking dust of Wheatland or Bisbee. . . . Aye, my lads, those were the great days when working stiff had nothing to lose but their chains, unless on occasion their lives. . . .¹¹

The Wobblies themselves, in large measure, helped to start this identification of their organization with the myth of the West. The internal history of the I.W.W.—as is the case apparently with most radical movements—is a history of schisms and purges. Begun in 1905 in Chicago by a heterogeneous group of socialists and industrial unionists as a corrective to the stodgy and conservative American Federation of Labor, the I.W.W. almost immediately fell apart in internecine quarreling. By 1908 most of the founding fathers from the Socialist Party and the Socialist Labor Party and all of the really functioning constituent unions had

⁸ Nard Jones, *Evergreen Land: A Portrait of the State of Washington* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1947), p. 81.

⁹ Archie Binns, *Sea in the Forest* (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1953).

¹⁰ S. H. Holbrook, "Wobbly Talk," *American Mercury*, VII (January, 1926), 62.

¹¹ S. H. Holbrook, "The Last of the Wobblies," *American Mercury*, LXII (April, 1946), 467-68.

deserted or had been purged. The I.W.W. that remained after 1908 became more and more a splinter group of intellectuals, impatient activists and fanatic professional union leaders manning a few barely skeletal unions. The most durable source of friction within the organization was a conflict between two groups calling themselves the "Centralizers" and the "Decentralizers." In 1913 the organization barely escaped a fourth schism because of this dispute, the anarchical Decentralizers advocating an abolition of the Chicago headquarters and of all central authority in the I.W.W.. In 1924 the I.W.W., by this time moribund, did finally split over this dispute, the Decentralizers establishing their own "Emergency Program" in excommunication in Portland, Oregon. The Decentralizers drew support largely from the hobo membership and could perhaps be called a "Western" faction, although the leaders of the opposing Centralizers were also Westerners. At any rate, the I.W.W. pretended to identify the anarchists as Westerners.¹² Wobblies discussed at great length in their press the respective merits of the "Western" hobo worker, or "bindle stiff," and the more sedentary Eastern factory worker, or "home guard." The General Executive Board of the I.W.W. in 1913 attacked this typically "Western" hobo Wobbly, this anarchical Decentralizer, for his excessive contentiousness and, strangely enough, for his inaction:

We find a situation in the West that if continued means the complete disruption of the only industrial organization in the world. In time of strike they sit around the hall talking of what ought to be done or devising means to do away with General Headquarters. It is impossible, however, to get them out on the picket line to fight the boss. They will talk of sabotage and direct action but leave it to the boss to use on the few who take up the fight. If this condition continues the I.W.W. will die of dry rot. . . .¹³

Other I.W.W. writers, however, defended the Western migrant worker as a source of great revolutionary strength, describing him in phrases foretelling the Wobbly of more recent popular legend. He was less a wage slave, less servile, than the Eastern industrial worker. He was, indeed, a "vagabond adventurer," "the scout of the labor army," "the franc tireur of the class struggle."¹⁴ Western Decentralizers, in their own defense, harped upon the dangers of autocracy, corruption, the scholastic ideologymongering that emanated from the Chicago headquarters, traits, of

¹² Frank Bohn, "Is the I. W. W. to Grow?" *International Socialist Review*, XII (July, 1911), 42-44.

¹³ *Proceedings of the Eighth Annual Convention of the I. W. W., 1913*, p. 34.

¹⁴ *Solidarity*, November 21, 1914, p. 3.

course, of an effete East. This emerging portrait of the "Western" Wobbly, drawn by both sympathetic and unsympathetic I.W.W. publicists, resembles in many features the picture of Frederick Jackson Turner's frontiersman with his "coarseness and strength," his "restless, nervous energy," his "buoyancy and exuberance."¹⁵

The legendary Wobbly from the logging camps, the non-ferrous mines and the wheat fields has, of course, a considerable basis in fact, but the legend tends to obscure other significant facts of I.W.W. history. At the first convention in 1905 the individual delegates, the founding fathers, were more apt to be Easterners than Westerners. The impetus for the constituent convention came as much from William Trautman of the brewers' union as it did from the Western Federation of Miners. Though the strongest functioning union that joined the new I.W.W. was the Western Federation of Miners, much of the program, ideology and initial prestige derived from such delegates as William Trautman, Daniel De Leon of the doctrinaire Socialist Labor Party, Eugene V. Debs of the newer Socialist Party, "Mother" Jones of the coal fields and from other prominent radicals and industrial unionists with few if any ties to the "frontier." Furthermore, the I.W.W. scored its first successes in the industrial East, in the steel and textile industries, where it attracted during brief crises great numbers of unskilled, immigrant workers. The stories of these mass strikes of the I.W.W. before the First World War have been told often. Indeed the pamphlet, newspaper, magazine and documentary literature on the early I.W.W. in the East is voluminous. But to correct the notion that the Wobbly was uniquely a frontiersman, some features of these strikes deserve to be reviewed and underscored.

Early in 1909 the Pressed Steel Car Company of McKee's Rocks, Pennsylvania, announced a new wage system that confused and irritated the predominantly immigrant labor force. The new rates were not to be posted, and the worker's wages were to be dependent upon the output of his "gang." The new system broke a camel's back already loaded with many grievances, and in July forty men formed an *ad hoc* committee to request the posting and explanation of the new wage rates. The company peremptorily discharged the forty men. The strike followed immediately. McKee's Rocks became an armed camp with special deputies and two hundred state constables on patrol. Violence inevitably occurred. When, in one riot, a striker was killed, the "Unknown Committee" directing the strike issued a bloodthirsty "life for a life" ultimatum to the authorities. The funeral procession for the dead striker became a

¹⁵ Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1920), p. 37.

grim demonstration with eulogies delivered at the grave in fifteen languages. The I.W.W. did not appear upon the scene—at least openly—until August. William Trautman conducted a public meeting for the strikers and organized an I.W.W. local. A week later strikers fought a pitched battle with state troopers in which eleven persons were killed. The strikers arrested after this fray were dragged down the streets behind troopers'—or Cossacks', as they were called by the Slavic strikers—horses. Finally as public sentiment in the Pittsburgh area swung around in support of the strikers, the Pressed Steel Car Company surrendered and granted the I.W.W.'s demands.¹⁶

Less than three years later the I.W.W. again attracted national attention when prominent Wobblies became leaders of a strike of textile workers in Lawrence, Massachusetts. On January 1, 1912, a newly enacted state law took effect, reducing the hours of work for women and minors from 56 hours, or more, to 54 hours a week. At the first pay day in January, 1912, it became obvious that the American Woolen Company mills in Lawrence had obeyed the letter of the law but had given a pro rata reduction in wages as well. The wage reduction was a serious crisis for many families living on the margins of their small budgets. When mill operators refused to see a committee from the small existing I.W.W. local, a strike spread quickly through most of the mills in Lawrence. On January 13, Joseph Ettor of the I.W.W. General Headquarters arrived to take up the reins of the strike. He became chairman of a strike committee composed of three delegates from each foreign language group in Lawrence. Militia companies also arrived, bringing in their wake sporadic violence. In the last week of January troops fired into the ranks of an I.W.W. parade and one woman striker was killed. Ten more companies of troops hurried to Lawrence. Ettor and Artur Giovannitti, a Wobbly poet and intellectual, were arrested as accessories to the murder of the woman striker. The I.W.W. thereupon sent William D. Haywood to succeed Ettor, and under Haywood's direction, the strike committee began to send children of strikers out of Lawrence to sanctuary in the homes of sympathizers in New York and other cities. A national outcry of sympathy for the strikers arose from this propaganda tactic that the I.W.W. borrowed from European Syndicalist practice, particularly after the Lawrence police on one occasion used violence and brutality to stop the children's exodus at the railroad station. A dynamite plot was uncovered and laid at the doorstep of the I.W.W., but the plot backfired

¹⁶ R. D. Smith, "Phases of the McKee's Rocks Strike," *Survey*, XXIII (October 2, 1909), 38. The *Survey* published a number of other articles and news items on the McKee's Rocks strike.

when evidence pointed not to the I.W.W. but to a local undertaker with ties to the operators. In March the operators gave up the fight, and the I.W.W. celebrated another victory.¹⁷

The Lawrence strike attracted widespread attention, leading to a Congressional investigation and thousands upon thousands of words of comment in the press. Progressives saw it as proof of the dangers of the high tariff and of "invisible government" by the "interests" supporting the Payne-Aldrich Tariff. Socialists, of course, gloated. The strike proved, if proof was necessary for them, that capitalists were behaving exactly as they were supposed to behave and creating in their wake a really disciplined and revolutionary working class. Conservatives trembled. Nativists saw the strike as a typical plot of "foreign radicals" that should convince even the blind of the need for immigration restriction.

In 1913 a silk strike in Paterson, New Jersey, stirred up almost as much excitement as had the Lawrence strike. Greenwich Village intellectuals at this point began their flirtation with the I.W.W. The Bohemian Left organized a great "strike pageant" in New York City, and real strikers were imported from the Paterson picket lines to move through the various *tableaux* created by John Reed and others.¹⁸ These bitter industrial conflicts in the East—and there were others—appeared as ominous thunder clouds over American society. Besides newspaper comment and Congressional inquiry, they stimulated a great deal of "sociological" explanation.¹⁹ At this high point of its effectiveness, the I.W.W. did not strike most Americans as a band of frontier individualists but rather as a cabal of dangerous "new immigrants" insinuating Syndicalism and other outlandish and un-American doctrines into a mythically classless America.

As late as 1917, the first scholarly historian of the I.W.W. interpreted the movement as the American reflection of a world tendency in radical labor unionism and not as a frontier phenomenon.²⁰ Another scholar viewed the I.W.W. as the response to the needs of two groups of submerged American workers, the Western migrants of legend and the unskilled immigrants of Eastern industry. The author of this latter study cited membership figures sent him by Vincent St. John of the I.W.W. General Executive Board, figures showing that over half of the Wobblies

¹⁷ The Congressional investigation of the Lawrence strike was conducted by the Rules Committee of the House of Representatives and published as *The Strike at Lawrence, Massachusetts* (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1912).

¹⁸ *New York Times*, May 22, 1913, p. 4; June 8, 1913, II, p. 2; June 9, 1913, p. 8.

¹⁹ For example: John Graham Brooks, *American Syndicalism: The I. W. W.* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1913); Andre Tridon, *The New Unionism* (New York: Huebsch, 1913).

²⁰ Paul Frederick Brissenden, *The I. W. W.: A Study of American Syndicalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1920).

at that date came from the Eastern steel and textile industries.²¹ By 1935, however, two historians of the American labor movement presented the Wobbly as a kind of Lochinvar from the West: "In 1909 these neglected and despised workers [Eastern unskilled, immigrant workers] found a champion which saw in their degradation and weakness a justification for its intervention. This champion came from the West."²² Haywood, of course, and several other Wobblies who rushed to the Eastern strikes to take over the leadership were indeed Westerners, trained for their jobs in the burly class wars fought by the Western Federation of Miners, but many other agitators and leaders were Easterners, such as Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, Carlo Tresca, Artur Giovannitti or George Andreychine. Furthermore, the I.W.W. at this crest of its career published newspapers in a half-dozen foreign languages. The organization obviously could command literate editorial talent in various immigrant groups and apparently expected to recruit most of its members from among Eastern immigrant workers. The thesis that the I.W.W. was a champion from the West requires some explanation if not defense.

Many Wobbly tactics, presumed to be so typically "Western" in the minds of regional authors, had their exact counterparts in as un-Western a place as New York City. "Free-speech Fights," and similar guerrilla combat devices, were not in fact limited to the West. While Wobbly "bindle stiffs" in Portland, Oregon, were entering expensive restaurants and ordering meals for which they had no intention of paying,²³ New York Wobblies were up to the same kind of pranks. Under the leadership of Frank Tannenbaum Wobblies exasperated the authorities of New York City by seeking refuge from the winter in exclusive middle-class churches.²⁴ It was an Italian Wobbly of the urban and Eastern "New Immigration," Joseph Ettor, who organized and helped direct the 1907 lumber mill strike in Portland, Oregon, that introduced the I.W.W. to the whole Pacific Northwest.²⁵ Other Eastern Wobblies played important parts in the sanguinary "Everett Massacre" of 1916 in the state of Washington.

The romance of the West that has come to encrust the I.W.W. undoubtedly began during the First World War when the organization did indeed conduct its last and noisiest efforts in the West. Wobblies

²¹ Louis Levine, "Development of Syndicalism in America," *Political Science Quarterly*, XXVIII (September, 1913), 478.

²² Selig Perlman and Philip Taft, *Labor Movements, 1896-1932* (John R. Commons, et al., *History of Labor in the United States*, Vol. IV [4 vols.; New York: Macmillan Co., 1926-35]), 262.

²³ *Portland Oregonian*, December 23, 1913, p. 13.

²⁴ *New York Times*, March 5, 1914, p. 1.

²⁵ *Portland Oregonian*, March 10, 1907, p. 1.

led wartime strikes in the non-ferrous mining regions of the West, and, in particular, they directed a general strike in the lumber industry of the Pacific Northwest. The public viewed this latter strike as little better than deliberate sabotage of the war effort, especially the production of Sitka spruce for airplane construction. In the lumber strike Wobblies hit upon tactics that writers have since cited as evidence of sorts for placing the Wobblies among the folk heroes of the frontier. As the suppression of the strike became more and more effective, Wobblies by the hundreds were put away in jails or in specially constructed "bull pens." Many stayed in jail for weeks, or even months, as the authorities searched for charges to bring against them, perhaps for draft evasion, perhaps for violations of the 1917 Espionage Act, perhaps, at last, for only vagrancy. At this point in the strike, the Wobblies "took the strike to the job," as they called it. Strikers went back to work but continued their harassments with slowdowns, sabotage and psychological attrition. For example, Wobblies acted as if their eight-hour-day strike demand had been won, and they quit work regularly after an eight-hour stint. When apoplectic foremen fired them, they merely packed their "bindles" and moved to another job to repeat the tactic. On the job they might also lose all initiative and know-how and wait helplessly for foremen's orders when even the most simple and obvious decisions had to be made. The I.W.W. claimed advantages for these exasperating tactics. The authorities, obviously, could no longer arrest strikers because everybody "worked" after a fashion. The companies' payrolls also unwittingly financed the "commissary" of the strike.²⁶

These disturbances in the West, coming as they did in the embattled years of 1917 and 1918, aroused more fear and indignation throughout the nation than had the earlier strikes in Lawrence or Paterson. City, county, state and federal governments, as well as extralegal vigilantes, turned their full wrath upon the I.W.W. The image of the Wobbly as a kind of backwoods bomb-thrower, as a buckskin Bolshevik, became current. It is this picture of the Wobbly that appears in Zane Grey's popular wartime novel, *The Sea of Wheat*. The riot in Centralia, Washington, on Armistice Day, 1919, in which Wobblies defended their hall against marchers in an American Legion parade, produced a postwar *cause célèbre* and also helped to fix this special Western image of the Wobbly.

As liberals and radicals regrouped after the debacle of the war, they found only a decaying and doctrinaire I.W.W. still surviving. The

²⁶ James Rowan, *The I. W. W. in the Lumber Industry* (Seattle, Wash.: I. W. W. Lumber Workers Industrial Union No. 500, n.d.).

organization had been bludgeoned by the Department of Justice, raided by the new Communist movement, broken by reviving internal squabbles of Centralizers and Decentralizers and it had already begun to ossify around its anarcho-syndicalist fundamentalism that was fast becoming irrelevant to the changing America of the 1920's and, before long, of the Great Depression. Perhaps naturally the American Left looked back to the irrepressible Wobblies as the expended shock troops of an old-style radicalism. Because the West had seen the last agony of the I.W.W., it was also perhaps natural to see the Wobblies as latter-day frontiersmen defending the fort of American liberty against the mounting forces of reaction and "fascism," forces which many intellectuals by the 1930's feared were on the point of winning the day. For the Left, the I.W.W. fitted very comfortably into the framework of Bacon's Rebellion, Jacksonian Democracy, Free-Soilism and Populism. From this perspective it was only a short step for popular writers to begin to blur all the ideological considerations and to begin to sentimentalize the "Western" Wobbly, stressing his zest for fighting, his unquenchable individualism, his crude humor, his "style." For John Dos Passos the Wobblies apparently had stood for ideological Paul Bunyans; for subsequent writers they came to be only Paul Bunyans.²⁷

That the Wobbly passed from the scene while struggling in Western mining towns and logging camps against the behemoth of modern capitalism does not suffice by itself to explain the I.W.W. legend. A crucial link between the "real" I.W.W. of intellectuals, immigrant wage workers, hoboes and labor union functionaries and the I.W.W. of sentimentalists is to be found in the radical intelligentsia of the early twentieth century, whose capital was Greenwich Village and whose journals were the "little magazines" and, especially, the *Masses*.

In perspective the I.W.W. appears as only one unusually militant rebellion within a more general disaffection with American society during the early 1900's. This discontent, summarized in textbooks under the name "Progressive Movement," touched politics, religion, education, academic philosophy and the arts as well as the labor movement. Perhaps the winning and the "closing" of the last frontier after the Civil War occasioned this pervasive urge for reform and change, but certainly just as basic was the maturation of American capitalism, bringing vague but unmistakable anxieties, fears that America had shifted gears into a new era with strange new problems and frustrations. Nowhere in the web of American culture is this change of temper more recognizable than in the literature of the period, a change analyzed and charted by critics

²⁷ The biographical sketch of Wesley Everest in *U. S. A.* is even entitled "Paul Bunyan."

of all schools. Serious young writers united in an assault upon the "Genteel Tradition," eagerly importing Naturalism, Symbolism, Decadence, Primitivism and other exotic literary postures from abroad. With the self-conscious literary revival came not so much a joy or *élan* as a heightened feeling of "alienation," endlessly discussed in the literary journals and memoirs, and a bitter and militant phase of *bourgeoisie*-baiting. The young writer avidly shopped for ideologies. Some chose anti-Puritanism, basing their position on an easy historical ignorance and a confusion of hard-headed Calvinism with the newly repudiated "Victorianism." America, they preached, too much stifled the id. Others, like Jack London, embraced Marx or Spencer, or became apostates from the whole liberal tradition and adopted the myth of the superman and the blond beast. One impresario of highbrow dissenters, Mabel Dodge, satisfied her longings by cultivating all the fashionable ideologies from Marx to Freud.

It is not surprising that some young intellectuals should soon "discover" the I.W.W. Wobblies by 1912 began to impress many intellectuals as kinds of noble primitives, enlisted to be sure under their own peculiar banners, but allies nonetheless in the common struggle against bourgeois philistinism. Greenwich Village could not fail to adumbrate a connection between the awesome I.W.W. leaders and primitivism, which in the American experience usually means the West. The connection, however, was never clearly made at this early date before the First World War because most of the Wobblies known to Greenwich Villagers of the *Masses* staff and the Liberal Club were themselves Easterners, brought to light by the textile strikes in Lawrence and Paterson. But "Big Bill" Haywood, an indubitable Westerner, early bemused the New York literary radicals. Mabel Dodge made him a popular attraction at some of her famous "evenings" in the Village. Though Mabel Dodge herself was something less than idolatrous—reporting that Haywood talked "as though he were wading blindfolded through sand"—most of her guests paid more than respectful attention.²⁸ To Max Eastman, Haywood was the "arch rebel, the one-eyed gigantic satan who scorned even to answer except with an oath the Socialist Party's excommunication of him."²⁹ When Haywood asked if he might have an article of his published in the *Masses*, Eastman, the editor, felt as though he were being admitted into an "heroic order."³⁰ Malcolm Cowley, a late-comer to the Village, knew of the prewar golden days only by hearsay; he described Haywood

²⁸ Mabel Dodge Luhan, *Movers and Shakers* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1936), p. 89.

²⁹ Max Eastman, *Enjoyment of Living* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1948), p. 445.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

as the "one-eyed man-mountain, the cyclops of the I.W.W.," who brought to his rapt listeners at Mabel Dodge's salons a feeling of participation in the lusty class wars of the mining camps of Idaho.³¹

Without too much strain, the idea of primitive strength and virtue that at one time or another attracted such intellectuals as Sherwood Anderson, Eugene O'Neill or Carl Van Vechten was projected by some of the lusty I.W.W. There was frequently more than a hint that this primitive vitality, enlisted in the fight against effete American capitalism, was really the latter-day expression of the traditional equalitarianism and individualism of the West. Floyd Dell, novelist and onetime editor and book reviewer of the *Masses*, dealt with the Wobblies in just this ideological framework even though he was not a particular devotee of the I.W.W. In one novel, for example, a middle-aged and somewhat inhibited Bostonian moves to California and begins the rediscovery of his youth after he is thrown by circumstances into a group of young, rowdy Wobblies at a "free-speech fight."³²

Other intellectuals of a less strenuous radicalism early tended to remake the Wobbly into a homely, one hundred per cent American, undoubtedly to distinguish him from the newer and more exotic Communists. The Wobblies themselves co-operated in this retouching job, and the emerging portrait of a rebellious, sturdy primitive, a Westerner and typical American, is virtually the finished picture. John Spargo, the leading theorist—or "theoretician"—of the American Socialist Party before the war, delineated the "typical" Wobbly for a national magazine, drawing him quite unlike the repulsive wartime portraits of the newspaper cartoonists. He was no bearded bomb-thrower. He was instead a "very attractive sort of man," sturdy, robust, virile, roughly dressed, to be sure, but with a bold and intelligent manner.³³ A few years later another writer for a national magazine continued the Americanization of the Wobbly. "The Wobs were a merry and rowdy lot, and the latter-day saints of Moscow were by way of contrast a blue-nosed and often sniveling congregation."³⁴ Even the Wobblies in their unhappy competition with the vaunting Communists came more and more to advertise the essential Western "Americanism" of their brand of radicalism.³⁵

³¹ Malcolm Cowley, *Exile's Return: A Literary Odyssey of the 1920's* (New York: Viking Press, 1951), p. 66.

³² Floyd Dell, *An Old Man's Folly* (New York: George H. Doran, 1926), pp. 102-21.

³³ John Spargo, "Why the I. W. W. Flourishes," *World's Work*, XXXIX (January, 1920), 244.

³⁴ S. Putnam, "Red Days in Chicago," *American Mercury*, XXX (September, 1933), 70.

³⁵ Abner Woodruff, "A Letter to the Professor," *One Big Union Monthly*, I (August, 1919), 25-27; *Chicago Replies to Moscow* (Chicago: I. W. W. circular, 1945).

Thus the reflection of the I.W.W. in popular legend and historiography has followed a traceable path, from an organization of dangerous, foreign "Syndicalists," to an organization of wartime saboteurs and traitors, to an organization of manly primitives fighting the good fight for freedom, to a jolly band of rogues ushering out the last frontier. Each succeeding image, of course, has served some special use, to supply evidence for nativists of the dangers of unrestricted immigration, to rally the community for a great war effort, to differentiate "American" from "Bolshevik" radicalism and to supply a colorful, boisterous tradition for writers of regional "local color." Apparently the destiny of the I.W.W. was not to bring in the "Cooperative Commonwealth" or the "Industrial Democracy" advocated so vociferously from its soap boxes but rather to stand as an exemplar of a hoary American ideology in a day of growing technological and psychological automation. In this case, the would-be Wobbly expropriators have been themselves expropriated.

